DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 333 EA 031 885

TITLE	Standards-Based Education. No Child Left Behind Issue Brief.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	GP-02-10
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	6p.; Adapted from "Standards & Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers" (1996).
CONTRACT	R215U010022
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Commission of the States, 700 Broadway, Suite 1200, Denver CO 80203-3460. Tel: 303-299-3600; Fax: 303-296-8332; Web site: http://www.ecs.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Academic Standards; Accountability; Curriculum Based Assessment; Curriculum Development; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation; Faculty Development; *State Standards
IDENTIFIERS	*No Child Left Behind Act 2001; State Policy; State Role

ABSTRACT

Standards-based reform relies on the premise that every student can reach higher levels of achievement if certain criteria are met. This brief, for policymakers, provides a short history of educational standards, an explanation of how standards-based reform works, and ways to align standards with other key policies to create meaningful reform. Standards are based on seven principles: (1) challenging standards apply to all students; (2) standards are clear, tangible, and widely communicated; (3) success is based on adequate time and student effort; (4) a variety of instructional strategies is used; (5) curriculum, assessments, and instruction align with content standards; (6) a variety of assessment tools is used; and (7) multiple levels of academic achievement are established. When these principles are applied, the evidence suggests that student learning will improve. Yet standards alone cannot raise student achievement. They need the support of other key policies on curriculum, assessment, teacher education, professional development, finances, and accountability. This brief is one in a series of ECS reports examining the impact of the No Child Left Behind education act on state policy and policymaking. (WFA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 468 333

Education Commission of the States

No Child Left Behind Issue Brief

Standards-Based Education

This is part of a series of ECS reports examining the impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the newly revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act on state policy and policymaking.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. F. WALKER
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

EA 031 985

Education Commission
of the States
700 Broadway, Suite 1200
Denver, CO 80203-3460
303.299.3600
Fax: 303.296.8332
www.ecs.org

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Education Commission of the States

No Child Left Behind Issue Brief

Standards-Based Education

This is part of a series of ECS reports examining the impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the newly revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act on state policy and policymaking.

Introduction

The challenge facing American education is to help all students learn at higher levels than ever before. How can states, districts and schools make improvements to help all students gain the knowledge and skills they need to be vital members of the American workforce and a democratic society?

Setting clear, high standards for all students is one way to meet the challenge. Standards are statements of what students should know and be able to do. They are statements against which we can judge the quality of curricula, instruction, and school and student achievement. In essence, standards are statements of what educators, policymakers and the public believe is important for academic achievement.

Standards-based reform is based on the premise that every student can reach higher levels of achievement if certain criteria are met: achievement levels are clearly defined; students know in advance what they have to do to meet them; and teaching, learning and assessment are designed in ways that support the achievement of students who work hard.

Where Standards Come From

A system of universal public education may be one of the most important social contributions of American democracy. But when the needs of citizens change – through shifts in the economy, technology or society at large – so do the demands on education.

Over the last two decades, the performance of American schools has slowly improved and is beginning to level off. Test scores, graduation rates and the achievement of minority students have all improved. But the results still fall far short of what students need to be effective citizens and workers in the 21st Century.

The national move toward standards-based reform follows a wave of public concern over the performance of American schools.[1] Declines in student test scores, beginning in the late 1970s, subjected the education system to a host of critical reports. U.S. students also were faring poorly on international assessments of mathematics and science, raising doubts about America's ability to compete in a global market. In addition, student achievement remained split along racial, ethnic and economic lines – a split that undermined the nation's claims to equal opportunity. Minority youngsters and those from low-income families seemed especially ill-served by the existing education system.

For Americans of nearly every background, education increasingly was spelling the difference between financial failure and success. As technological changes transformed the workplace and the demand for semiskilled labor fell, less-educated workers saw their earnings drop. And these economic trends showed no sign of slowing.

By the late 1980s, the product of America's schools came to be seen as more important and less acceptable than ever before. And it was student achievement – not simply "seat time" – that mattered. The consensus was that schools should be judged not only by their "inputs" (resources, facilities, number of advanced degrees among teachers, etc.), but also by their "outputs" or results (that is, student achievement).

The problem came in measuring "outputs"; no single gauge of student achievement was readily available. Two administrations set out to change that. In 1989, President George Bush and

EA 031 985

Education Commission
of the States
700 Broadway, Suite 1200
Denver, CO 80203-3460
303.299.3600
Fax: 303.296.8332
www.ecs.org

No Child Left Behind Issue Brief

Standards-Based Education (cont'd)

Definitions

CONTENT STANDARDS clearly define what students should know and be able to do in various subject areas and at different points in their education.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS provide concrete examples and explicit definitions of how well students must learn the material represented by content standards. Achievement "levels" also may be used to define students' demonstrated proficiency at various points as they progress toward a standard.

ASSESSMENT is the measurement of what a student knows and is able to do, usually expressed in terms of progress toward a standard or mastery of a standard. Assessment can include diverse measures such as multiple-choice tests, constructed responses, short-answer or essays to show what – and how well – a student has mastered a content standard.

(more)

the nation's governors agreed on a framework of national education goals. America 2000 called for students to demonstrate competency in a core set of skills and knowledge, encouraged local community planning to meet the goals and funded various efforts to develop voluntary education standards. The Goals 2000 program also recognized the need to develop voluntary standards and provided states with grants for that purpose.

How Standards-Based Reform Works

Until the early 1990s, America's public schools had no clear standards for what every student who graduates should know and be able to do. Expectations varied from school to school and from teacher to teacher. And these expectations were often too low to provide students with what they needed to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Standards-based reform raises expectations. By requiring all students to master challenging subject matter – and by providing them with the time and tools to do so – standards also enhance education equity. The goal is to raise both the ceiling and the floor of achievement for all students.

Standards are based on several principles. Together, they form the rationale for a standards-based system:

- **Challenging standards apply to all students.** Standards must reflect a curriculum in which students are expected to know basic skills, as well as write well-organized essays, solve real-world problems, understand and apply scientific principles, and communicate clearly.
- **Standards are clear, tangible and widely communicated.** Standards are clear and specific enough to give teachers guidance in selecting curricula and instructional practices to help students achieve standards. Students also know in advance what "success" looks like. They are supplied with examples of high-quality work and the criteria they need to meet the standards.
- **Success is based on providing adequate time and student effort.** Students learn at different rates. When students have adequate time and work hard, they can meet required standards.
- **A variety of instructional strategies are used.** Students learn in different ways and benefit from a variety of instructional approaches. Diverse approaches are found most often in schools where staff make their own curricular decisions and have a particular "design" or focus.
- **Curriculum, assessments and instruction are aligned with content standards.** Assessment tasks should measure student progress on the knowledge they are taught. Curriculum, professional development, instruction and teacher certification policies should reinforce standards.
- **A variety of assessment tools are used.** Different types of tests may be used to assess different standards. A multiple-choice test may be used to assess both basic and complete skills. In addition, constructed-response, short-answer or essay questions can be used to assess more complex tasks.
- **Multiple levels of academic achievement are established.** Multiple achievement levels (e.g., "making progress toward the standard," "meets the standard," "exceeds the standard") make it possible to tell students where they stand with respect to achieving a standard. Additional instruction can help students move to a higher level of achievement.

No Child Left Behind Issue Brief

Standards-Based Education (cont'd)

When these principles are used to guide a standards-based system, the evidence suggests that student learning and achievement improve.[2]

Aligning State and Local Policy

Standards cannot succeed in boosting student achievement without the support of other key policies. The alignment of curriculum, assessment, teacher education, professional development, finance and accountability is critical.

Curriculum

If key policies are properly aligned, standards can focus the scope and sequence of a school curriculum. States can support the identification and use of high-quality curriculum materials in classrooms by:

- **Creating state content standards that fit together to define a feasible set of core skills and knowledge.** States have developed as many as eight different sets of standards, usually through separate groups, making it impossible to teach all within a single school year.
- **Creating "model" frameworks** that provide examples of standards, curriculum, assessments (including achievement criteria, benchmarks and examples of student work) and professional development strategies.
- **Identifying curricular material aligned with state standards.** This material could be provided on the Internet or through a textbook-adoption process.
- **Aligning state assessments and professional development opportunities with state standards.**
- **Assisting districts on curriculum issues when requested.** Informal audits, for example, might indicate how well the curriculum is aligned with state or local standards.

Assessment

Standards specify what students are expected to know and be able to do. Assessments make those expectations concrete by providing the basis on which students and educators can be held accountable.

Assessments play an important role in standards-based reform by:

- Communicating the goals that school systems, schools, teachers and students are expected to achieve
- Providing targets for teaching and learning
- Shaping the performance of educators and students.

Standards are most effective when assessments are good measures of the standards and are aligned. If they are mismatched, however, assessments can undermine and distort standards. Suppose, for example, that standards emphasize the development of problem-solving skills, but the corresponding assessments require only the ability to recall simple facts or to recognize correct answers on frequently practiced problems. The standards then will be little more than

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Definitions (cont'd)

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS provide information that tell policymakers, the public and other stakeholders how well the education system – classrooms, schools, districts – is doing. Information typically includes student assessment data, indicators and studies. Accountability information can be used in different ways: to provide information to the public, to help stakeholders reach agreement on how to improve the system, or to provide rewards or sanctions for success or failure.

This *ECS Issue Brief* was adapted from *Standards & Education: A Roadmap for State Policymakers*, published by the Education Commission of the States, 1996. For more information on the issues discussed, please visit the ECS Web site at www.ecs.org.

No Child Left Behind Issue Brief

Standards-Based Education (cont'd)

© Copyright 2002 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide organization that helps state leaders shape education policy. It is ECS policy to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

Production of this report was supported by grant R215U010022 from the U.S. Department of Education. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

Cost of this three-piece issue brief series is $6 plus postage and handling. Ask for GP-02-10.

To request permission to excerpt part of this publication, either in print or electronically, please fax a request to the attention of the ECS Communications Department, 303.296.8332 or e-mail ecs@ecs.org.

hollow words. At the other extreme, important basic skills and core knowledge may be short-changed on an assessment that stresses only higher-order conceptual thinking.

Two factors can affect the alignment between standards and assessment. First, the assessment must be a comprehensive measure of the standards. Second, alignment requires a match between the knowledge, skills and understanding required by the assessment task and those expressed in the standards. Achieving alignment may require the use of a mix of assessment formats (e.g., multiple-choice, constructed-response, short-answer or essay).

Using Assessment Results for Accountability Purposes

States, districts and schools must decide not only how to administer assessments but – just as important – what to do with the results.

States create accountability systems by combining indicators (e.g., dropout rate) with student assessment results. Student assessment results can be aggregated to determine how well a school is doing. Low-performing schools are expected to meet achievement targets by making adequate yearly progress. Many states have legislated consequences or "sanctions" for schools that have consistently been low performing. States also publicly report results as a way to place more accountability pressure on schools and districts for improving teaching and learning.

Accountability systems that have consequences attached to them can lead to greater effort from students and schools. Achievement gaps are monitored by disaggregating data and reporting results by students of different backgrounds. This allows educators and policymakers to monitor how well all students are doing.

When consequences are applied to low-performing schools, it is important that the assessments meet high technical quality. Issues like an assessment's validity, accuracy and fairness must be addressed by assessments, or they may leave a state open to legal challenges.

Endnotes

1. This history of standards draws from the work of Diane Ravitch (1995) in National Standards in *American Education A Citizen's Guide*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
2. Grissmer, David, and Flanagan, Ann (1998, November). *Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas*. National Education Goals Panel.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").